

Intercultural Business Communication Tips

The Power Distance Index (PDI) is one of the five intercultural dimensions developed by Hofstede. In short this cultural dimension looks at how much a culture does or does not value hierarchical relationships and respect for authority. Examples of cultures with high PDI scores include Arabic speaking countries, Russia, India and China. Those with low scores include Japan, Australia and Canada.

So how does this manifest in a culture or country? In a high power distance cultures the following may be observed:

- . Those in authority openly demonstrate their rank.
- . Subordinates are not given important work and expect clear guidance from above.
- . Subordinates are expected to take the blame for things going wrong.
- . The relationship between boss and subordinate is rarely close/personal.
- . Politics is prone to totalitarianism.
- . Class divisions within society are accepted.

In a low power distance culture:

- . Superiors treat subordinates with respect and do not pull rank.
- . Subordinates are entrusted with important assignments.
- . Blame is either shared or very often accepted by the superior due to it being their responsibility to manage.
- . Managers may often socialize with subordinates.
- . Liberal democracies are the norm.
- . Societies lean more towards egalitarianism.

If you are working with or going to a country with a higher PDI than yours then:

- give clear and explicit directions to those working with you. Deadlines should be highlighted and stressed.
- do not expect subordinates to take initiative.
- be more authoritarian in your management style. Relationships with staff may be more distant than you are used to.
- show respect and deference to those higher up the ladder. This is usually reflected through language, behavior and protocol.
- expect to encounter more bureaucracy in organizations and government agencies.

If you are working with or going to a country with a lower PDI than yours then:

- don't expect to be treated with the usual respect or deference you may be used to.
- people will want to get to know you in an informal manner with little protocol or etiquette.
- be more inclusive in your management or leadership style as being directive will be poorly interpreted.
- involve others in decision making.
- do not base judgments of people on appearance, demeanor, privileges or status symbols

Individualism is one of the five intercultural dimensions developed by Hofstede. In short this cultural dimension looks at how much a culture emphasizes the rights of the individual versus those of the group (whether it be family, tribe, company, etc). Individualist cultures include the United States and much of Western Europe, where personal achievements are emphasized. Collectivist cultures, such as China, Korea, and Japan, emphasize the group such as the family and at work this manifests in a strong work group mentality.

So how does this manifest in a culture or country? In a country that scores highly on the individualism scale the following traits are common:

- . A person's identity revolves around the "I"
- . Personal goals and achievement are strived for
- . It is acceptable to pursue individual goals at the expense of others
- . 'Individualism' is encouraged whether it be personality, clothes or music tastes
- . The right of the individual reign supreme; thus laws to protect choices and freedom of speech

In a country that scores low on the individualism scale the following traits are common:

- . "We" is more important than "I"
- . Conformity is expected and perceived positively.
- . Individual's desires and aspirations should be curbed if necessary for the good of the group.
- . The rights of the family (or for the common good) are more important.
- . Rules provide stability, order, obedience.

If you are working or doing business in a country with a higher individualism score than yourself then:

- . Remember that you can't depend on the group for answers. As an individual you are expected to work on your own and use your initiative.
- . Prepare yourself for a business environment that may be less reliant on relationships and personal contacts. Business and personal life may very well be kept separate.
- . Employees or subordinates will expect the chance to work on projects or solve issues independently. Being too intrusive into their work may be interpreted negatively.
- . It is not uncommon for people to try and stand out from the rest. This may be during meetings, presentations or even during group work.
- . Bear in mind that a certain amount of individual expression is tolerated, i.e. people's appearance, behavior, etc.

If you are working or doing business in a country with a lower individualism score than yourself then:

- . Note that individuals will have a strong sense of responsibility for their family which can mean they take precedence over business.
- . Remember that praise should always be directed to a team rather than individuals as otherwise this may cause people embarrassment. Reward teams not people.
- . Understand that promotions depend upon seniority and experience-not performance and achievement.
- . Decision making may be a slow process, as many individuals across the hierarchy will need to be consulted.

Masculinity is one of the five intercultural dimensions developed by Hofstede. It is also one of the least understood as many people tend to associate it with masculinity literally. In essence it looks at the degree to which 'masculine' values like competitiveness and the acquisition of wealth are valued over 'feminine' values like relationship building and quality of life.

Hofstede never meant to describe how gender empowerment differs in a culture but rather uses the term 'masculinity' to capture certain propensities. If one looks at the cultures with a low masculinity rating they will notice that many also have low gender equality, i.e. Middle East. The terms relate to nurturing (feminine) versus assertive (masculine) behaviors and ideals.

From Hofstede's research Japan was found to be the world's most masculine society, with a rating of 95. Sweden was the most feminine with a rating of 5. Other examples of "masculine" cultures include the USA, Germany, Ireland and Italy. "Feminine" cultures include Spain, Thailand, Korea, Portugal and the Middle East.

So how does this manifest in a culture or country? Below are some of the common traits found in countries that score low on the masculinity scale:

- . In life the main priorities are the family, relationships and quality of life
- . Conflicts should ideally be solved through negotiation
- . Men and women should share equal positions in society
- . Professionals "work to live", meaning longer vacations and flexible working hours

Below are some of the common traits found in countries that score high on the masculinity scale:

- . Life's priorities are achievement, wealth and expansion
- . It is acceptable to settle conflicts through aggressive means
- . Women and men have different roles in society
- . Professionals often "live to work", meaning longer work hours and short vacations

If you are working or doing business in a country with a higher masculinity score than yourself then:

- . To succeed in this culture you will be expected to make sacrifices in the form of longer work hours, shorter holidays and possibly more travel.
- . Be aware that people will discuss business anytime, even at social gatherings.
- . Avoid asking personal questions in business situations. Your colleagues or prospective partners will probably want to get straight to business.
- . People are not always interested in developing closer friendships.
- . Communication style that is direct, concise and unemotional will be most effective in this environment.
- . People will use professional identity, rather than family or contacts, to assess others.
- . Self-promotion is an acceptable part of the business culture in this competitive environment.

If you are working or doing business in a country with a lower masculinity score than yourself then:

- . Recognize that people value their personal time. They prioritize family and take longer holidays. Working overtime is not the norm.
- . Small talk at social (or business) functions will focus on an individual's life and interests rather than just business.
- . Personal questions are normal rather than intrusive.

- . In business dealings trust weighs more than projected profit margins and the like.
- . Nepotism is seen as a positive and people openly show favoritism to close relations.

Uncertainty avoidance is one of the five intercultural dimensions developed by Hofstede. In essence this cultural dimension measures a country or culture's preference for strict laws and regulations over ambiguity and risk.

According to Hofstede's findings Greece is the most risk-averse culture while Singapore the least. Generally speaking Protestant countries and those with Chinese influences score low. Catholic, Buddhist and Arabic speaking countries tend to score high in uncertainty avoidance.

So how does this manifest in a culture or country? Below are some of the common traits found in countries that score highly on the uncertainty avoidance scale:

- . Usually countries/cultures with a long history.
- . The population is not multicultural, i.e. homogenous.
- . Risks, even calculated, are avoided in business.
- . New ideas and concepts are more difficult to introduce.

Some of the common traits found in countries that score low on the uncertainty avoidance scale include:

- . Usually a country with a young history, i.e. USA.
- . The population is much more diverse due to waves of immigration.
- . Risk is embraced as part of business.
- . Innovation and pushing boundaries is encouraged.

If you are working or doing business in a country with a higher uncertainty avoidance score than yourself then:

- . Don't expect new ideas, ways or methods to be readily embraced. You need to allow time to help develop an understanding of an initiative to help foster confidence in it.
- . Involve local counterparts in projects to allow them a sense of understanding. This then decreases the element of the unknown.
- . Be prepared for a more fatalistic world view. People may not feel fully in control and are therefore possibly less willing to make decisions with some element of the unknown.
- . Remember that due to a need to negate uncertainty proposals and presentations will be examined in fine detail. Back up everything with facts and statistics.

If you are working or doing business in a country with a lower uncertainty avoidance score than yourself then:

- . Try to be more flexible or open in your approach to new ideas than you may be used to.
- . Be prepared to push through agreed plans quickly as they would be expected to be realized as soon as possible.
- . Allow employees the autonomy and space to execute their tasks on their own; only guidelines and resources will be expected of you.
- . Recognize that nationals in the country may take a different approach to life and see their destiny in their own hands

<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/intercultural-business-communication/tool.php?culture1=52&culture2=0>